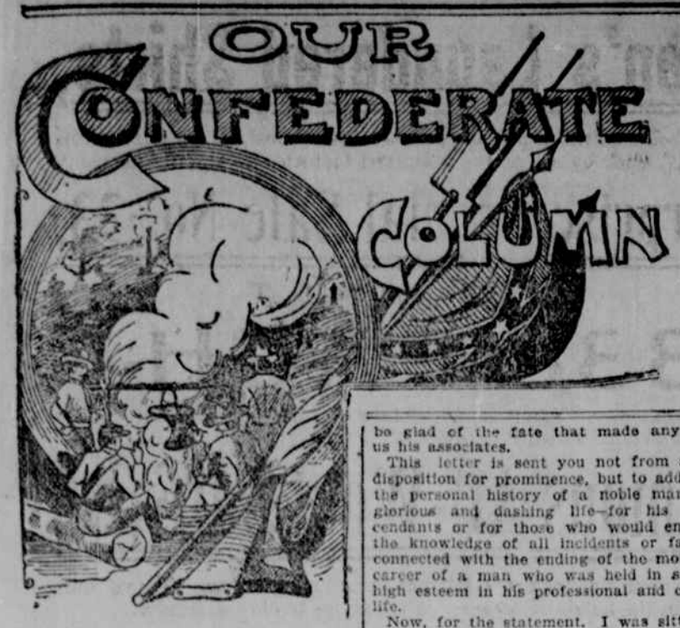

CHIVALROUS WHITING

HIS CAPTURE AND DEATH WHILE A PRISONER.

HIS REPORT ON FORT FISHER.

DISAPPOINTMENT THAT SECRETARY STA' NTON CAUSED HIM.

HIS FUNERAL IN NEW YORK.

The Volunteer Pall-Bearers—Placed a Flower on His Coffin—Some Early Recollections—Lee, D. H. Hill, and Grant.

The following exceedingly interesting letter appears in a recent issue of the Norfolk Virginian:

Duluth, Minn., April 26, 1897.

M. Glennan, Esq., Editor Norfolk Virginian:

My Dear Sir,—More than a year since the Hon. William Wirt Henry, of Richmond, Va., sent me here several Wilmington papers touching upon the life and services of the late General W. H. C. Whiting, Confederate States army.

I had met Mr. Henry here and had quite often referred to my personal acquaintance and social association with this talented officer and accomplished gentleman when he was a first lieutenant in the corps of engineers, United States army, and stationed at Fort Point (now Fort Winfield Scott) at the entrance to San Francisco harbor—i. e., "The Golden Gate." His brother, Jasper (who was an aide to General S. Cooper, Confederate States army, at Richmond), and Robert (afterwards in my New York office), were surveying the State of California under government contracts, and made their homes at Fort Point, upon their return from their arduous trips.

I have more of that detail, but pass it over to reach the purpose of my letter.

I am a son of the late General Charles S. Merchant, Fourth Artillery, United States army, and a brother of Anderson Merchant, Confederate States army (captured at Port Hudson), hence I had the advantage of army birthright, and lived at the Presidio of San Francisco (the artillery station), with General E. D. Keyes (then captain and in command), and the engineering officers at Fort Point were a part of the officers' mess.

Some weeks ago I received the Charleston News and Courier of May 30, 1895, and read with much interest the address of Captain C. B. Denson, before the Ladies' Memorial Association of North Carolina—a brief reference by yourself and Colonel J. S. Fairley's communication on General Whiting's military career and personal merits.

I had promised the Wilmington paper to write some personal reminiscences upon General Whiting, as our family associations at the Presidio and the daily interchange between the Fort Point and Presidio officers (a mile apart) opened windows for light on personal characters and experiences which never would come to our knowledge in any other way.

The object of this letter is for your permission to correct some unintentional mistakes in the address of Captain Denson.

I hope you will approve of any correction of statements that could be made by those who knew him and loved him before you met him through "the late unpleasantness."

Taking the natural intelligence, his education, his studious habits, his love of reading, of Whiting—setting aside his military qualifications—one could not help to look up to him as a leader and be glad of the fate that made any of us his associates.

This letter is sent you not from any disposition for prominence, but to add to the personal history of a noble man—a glorious and dashing life—for his descendants or for those who would enjoy the knowledge of all incidents or facts connected with the ending of the mortal career of a man who was held in such high esteem in his professional and civil life.

Now, for the statement. I was sitting in my office at 88 Wall street, New York city, one afternoon late in February, 1855 (Robert E. K., brother, of General Whiting, being an associate in my business and in the office at the time), when a gentleman (a New York steamship owner) entered the office—named Dickinson—and said:

"Merchant, General Whiting is a prisoner of war at Governor's Island and wishes to see you at once."

I said to him: "When did he arrive there and where did he come from?"

"He was captured at Fort Fisher."

Dickinson handed me two English sterling bills of exchange (I forget the amount) and said: "Whiting said get those cashed and bring him the money and come at once. He wants to see you."

When Whiting bid me good-by in San Francisco in February, 1856, he said: "Good-by, Steve. Whenever you enter Vanity Fair, remember me!"

The time had come!

My father, as brigadier-general, was in command at Bedloe's Island, being the rendezvous for all recruits for the Army of the Potomac.

Colonel Bomford, commander Eighth Regiment, United States Infantry, associate of my brother, Charles G. Merchant, was in command at Governor's Island.

General Dix was in command of the Department of the East, headquarters New York city.

No civilians were allowed at any of the military stations except they had a permit from Dix.

I gave no thought to a permit.

I at once went to the South Ferry and took a ferry-boat to Atlantic street, Brooklyn. There I took a Whitehall boat and had the oarsman skin close to the shore of the island, though warned off by successive sentries, until we reached the landing float at the wharf, and while the sentry's back was turned I jumped upon it (previously arranging details to force a landing) and the oarsman pulled away rapidly, leaving me there to listen to the sentry's call to the oarsman to "come back and take that man away."

This call I interrupted through my knowledge of military forms by:

"Sentinel, call the sergeant of the guard!"

As no civilian could understand the giving of such an order, the sentinel, under his discipline, responded at once.

"Sergeant of the Guard No. 1!"

The sergeant came. I said: "Sergeant, I wish to see the officer of the day."

He obeyed, and took me to the officer of the day's quarters, within the square of the buildings composing Fort Columbus. I forget his name. Introducing myself as a son of General Merchant, I said: "I wished to see Colonel Bomford." So he walked with me to Colonel Bomford's quarters, and there left me.

I stated to Colonel Bomford the purpose of my visit (after a family talk), and he sent me to the hospital, which was a large, two-story brick building, facing the west.

I walked up-stairs and knocked at the door of the room the hospital steward had directed me to.

A young-looking, handsome man, dressed in Confederate gray, opened the door half way on its hinges.

I said to him:, "Is General Whiting here?"

This officer, as I remember, rather shrunk from my inquiry, possibly suspecting me to be a northern news-reporter, but, turning toward Whiting, whom I could see lying upon a cot covered with blankets, said:

"General, there is a gentleman here asks to see you."

Whiting's sweet voice of tenderness, blended with the power of command, came through the air:

"What's his name?"

"He says his name is Steve Merchant."

Whiting's order came—I recall it now, so full of gladness—"Pass him in, d——n him!"

I was then introduced to his staff, but can only remember Hill, who let me in the room, and his doctor, who was a nephew, I think, of Jeff. Davis.

I was with him for some time, talking over other days on the Pacific and the situation for the contending armies and political results.

Robert was often at the hospital to see him, taking often flowers and delicacies from Mrs. Merchant's father, Frederick H. Wolcott, of Hurl Gate, Astoria, Long Island, who was a grandson of Oliver Wolcott, of Washington's Administration, and a very ardent Republican, while I was one of those silent Democrats the North blushed for—all honor to his liberal thought and loving, kindly acts toward Whiting—God bless him in the world beyond.

I have a slight recollection that General Whiting dictated his report on the operations at Fort Fisher to the Confederate War Department and was much chagrined at Stanton's refusal to have it passed through the army lines, as also, I think, his refusal to return it. Another act, at the time, which touched Whiting's sensibilities was the execution, within view of his front window, of Beale, a Confederate spy.

Before blood poisoning set in from his wounds I saw he was losing flesh and strength, and had Robert urge him to have Federal medical advice, but he refused the aid.

An unexpected note from Colonel Bomford (the gallant gentleman) one afternoon in March came to my office:

"I think Whiting is failing rapidly. You had better telegraph for his mother and sisters at Hartford, if you want them to see him. I will have my barge in charge of my coxswain at the Governor's Island landing at the Battery at 11 P. M. to meet you if the ladies arrive on New Haven and Hartford train, due at that hour."

I telegraphed, sending Robert to the island at once. Mrs. Whiting and one daughter arrived at 11:30 P. M. I met them and took them by carriage to the foot of Whitehall street, the battery landing. A dense fog had settled over the city and waters of the bay. The tide was on the ebb, which meant no lifting of the fog. We waited an hour—till 1 A. M.—when, after a talk with the coxswain, we decided to try the crossing.

Placing the ladies in the after part of the barge, with an order to keep the head of the boat well against the outflowing waters of the East river, we started out into the Cimmerian darkness.

We landed at the extreme western point of the island, then crept along the shore of the wharf. When we reached the hospital Whiting had passed

"From grief and groan to a golden Throne
Beside the King of Heaven."

Then came the thought, what is the next move in this tragical outcome? I decided to telegraph to the Rev. Edward A. Washburn, the pastor of the Whitings at Hartford, to come down and perform the funeral services, which I assumed we would hold at the chapel on Governor's Island.

He answered he could not come, but had requested Morgan Dix to act in his place, which was arranged for, and he directed the remains be brought to Trinity church.

As I recall the tempestuous condition of the public mind at that date; that General Dix, whoever tears down the American flag shoot him on the spot," was in command of the military forces of the Atlantic Department, and was the father of the minister who possessed stamina of character sufficient to order the conditions for Whiting's burial, I feel obligated forever to respect and regard a man of such unbiased qualities. I cannot remember all who were in the vestibule of Trinity church at the time that we took a last look at Whiting's refined and handsome features.

I do remember, however, under the custom of those days the undertaker had men to carry the casket while the pall-bearers filed on the side or in the rear of the casket. I do remember that when the four men came in to carry the casket up the aisle of the church to its chancel that I said to those four men, "Hold on," and turning toward the friends present I said: "Gentlemen, we all loved Henry Whiting when he was alive and with us, and I call for volunteers to carry the casket."

I remember Captain F. E. Prince (a lieutenant in Whiting's corps and in charge of fortifications at Alcatraz's Island, San Francisco harbor, when Whiting was at Fort Point), on leave of absence then in New York; Captain Berryea, a son-in-law of General Stanton, formerly quartermaster-general of the United States army, both in Federal uniform; Sylvester Mowry, captain Third Artillery, United States army, in civilian dress; Robert E. K. Whiting, his brother, and myself. There were others, but I have no record save memory, and that is a treacherous receptable if it has to cover all events since the Mexican war.

Mowry was stationed at the Presidio when Whiting was at Fort Point.

Passing up the aisle, when the casket had reached the middle of the church, a delicate, refined-looking hand was passed from the aisle end of a pew until it reached the centre of the casket, when a white rose, tied with black ribbon, was gently laid upon it.

Ten years later I learned that Mrs. Jacob Barton, of Astoria, L. I., was that young unmarried woman. Her name at the time was Anna Key Steele, living in Maryland, and I think her grandfather was the author of the now national hymn, "The Star Spangled Banner."

I know where Whiting's remains were laid in Greenwood Cemetery, but the past is so much of an intense dream to-day that I turn with deep regret from all it brought to what it cannot bring.

I was secretary of the Pacific Mail and Steamship Company at New York, and superintended the protection of the machinery of the steamship Star of the West, as well as provisioning, when the government was sending relief to Anderson at Sumter. Allan McLane, brother of Robert McLane, of Baltimore, was president of the company.

Lieutenants Robert C. Tyler and E. McHudson, of the Third Artillery, were the officers in charge of the relieving force. They were mess-mates of Whiting at the Presidio, but we had no idea that Whiting was there, and that his chivalrous conduct on the Pacific Coast had taken such a sombre hue. I have given you briefly and in an offhand way whatever at the moment my memory recalls. The details are from a participant in Whiting's last days on earth in New York harbor. The events were impressed, but I regret to say not all of them.

As monitors to establish in part my personal standard through life and to intensify my memory at such a period, you must remember that G. W. C. Lee (familiarly then called Custis) was a constant companion; that his superb moral principles and graces of conduct, pure thoughts, and finished education and manners, acted like the rays of a light borne upon my young years amid the dangerous associations of the wild pioneer Pacific Coast; that Whiting, with his dashing, magnetic manners, love of his profession, and books, zealous and untiring loyalty to man or woman, the knowledged strength for future development, and advancement, must necessarily seek a sympathetic emulation.

To the Rev. E. A. Washburn belongs the credit of Whiting's burial without pomp, but still a public and semi-distinguished burial. Not many officers in your service, dying at the North, received the marked attention he had given him.

I had known Washburn when he first entered the ministry in Newburyport, Mass., in 1819. He was a self-reliant, liberal churchman—one of the strongest intellects in the church in this country—but he refused to bend to the empty forms of church mannerisms, and he could not reach a bishopric.

No reference in public and private was ever made to the manner in which the Trinity church services were brought about. Enough that Morgan Dix officiated under the roof of old Trinity, and that no exceptions were filed by his father, the commander of the department. Some of the papers attacked the proceedings editorially, but the attacks were forgotten when the head lines of the morning papers read, "All Quiet on the Potomac."

There was a rumor (only) current within ninety days after Whiting's death that Colonel Bomford had been relieved from his command on account of his kindness to the Confederate officer.

If the Memorial Association have any use of details touching their "In Memoriams," they have them here.

Very sincerely,

STEPHEN L. MERCHANT.

Lee—D. H. Hill—Grant.

(Wilmington (N. C.) Messenger.)

The idea of a Georgian daring to charge General Lee with timidity and General D. H. Hill with cowardice is indeed a very remarkable incident in a man's life. General Lee was a man of singular courage and balance. Read Long's life of him, and especially that story of splendid risk and service when alone at night he advanced into the enemy's country (Mexico in 1846) and found out the true route for General Scott to advance. Scott said Lee really was the hero of the Mexican war, and but a captain. As to General D. H. Hill, of him it might be said as of Marshall Ney—"the bravest of the brave." He was cool in the midst of hickest dangers. An officer told us ong ago one of the generals said to him that he had doubted Hill's reputation for special bravery above other men, but at Fredericksburg (we think it was) he learned better. He said: "General Hill said, 'Mount your horse and accompany me.' He then started off, and in full view of the enemy's batteries rode leisurely down a railroad track until he had advanced far enough to make the observations he desired with his glass. We were in full view of the gunners. They threw a few shots at us that failed of effect. I was not at all comfortable, but so far as I could see General Hill was oblivious of them and as collected as if there were not a blue-coat in a hundred miles. He turned and rode leisurely back, and I was glad when it was over." Another soldier told us in that war that he heard General Hill says one day that at the opening of a battle he did not feel as comfortable as he desired, and that he would not care for an intimate friend to watch his features scrutinizingly. He at least never betrayed, so scores of witnesses said, either anxiety or nervous tension. He was calm, self-poised, absolutely cool. A lieutenant in the Enfield Blues told in the war how he was helped in the skirmish at Bethel. He said he was lying down and watching anxiously the approach of the Yankees. He was something nervous—excited. Colonel Hill, in command of the First North Carolina, a this juncture walked quietly along the line of his men, eating cracker and cheese as carelessly as if he were at home, munching as he meditated. The lieutenant said he watched and thought, "Colonel Hill is not afraid, but cool and collected. Let me brace up." And so he did.

We all know Lee's greatness and grandeur. A prominent Virginia lawyer said to us, and he had been drawn close to General Lee after the war, as he was a trustee of Washington and Lee University, and had voted to place the illustrious southerner at the head of that college. "I have known but very few, if any men, who grew in dimensions as you came in familiar contact with them. Nearly all diminished in stature with such association. But it was not so with General Lee. He grew in greatness as you got closer to him and saw the man fully revealed." We have often written as our own opinion that Lee is the most knightly hero in history—the only Sir Galahad of all the world's Round Table. He is the very highest embodiment and expression of American manhood—the noblest, the greatest, the most lovable of all the great men of our own land—rounder, completer, greater than Washington. The head of the British army, Lord Wolseley, had printed his opinion—that Lee was a greater soldier than Wellington, Colonel Chesney, in his day the highest military authority in Great Britain, wrote and published in Blackwood's Magazine that the three greatest soldiers of the English-speaking race were Marlborough, Wellington, Lee, giving them in the order of birth.

A good many years ago, perhaps fourteen or more, we saw published John Russell Young's statement of General Grant's opinion of General Robert E. Lee. We were not surprised at the depreciation very much, for we had known long before that he did not properly appreciate or understand his great adversary. In 1865, he said, in response to a direct inquiry of our own as to how General Lee impressed him as a military commander—what were his leading qualities and characteristics as a soldier: "I have no disposition to disparage General Lee. He is a good man, a good man," repeating the word. He added: "His greatest quality is his ability to excite enthusiasm in his soldiers."

This prepared us somewhat to hear him talk as Young reports him. We copy from the account in the Philadelphia Times:

"Lee was of a slow, conservative, cautious nature, without imagination or humor, always the same, with grave dignity. I never could see in his achievements what justifies his reputation. The illusion that nothing but heavy odds beat him will not stand in the ultimate light of history. I know it is not true. Lee was a good deal of a headquarter's general—a desk general—from what I can hear, and from what his officers say. He was almost too old for active service—the best service in the field. At the time of the surrender he was 58 or 59, and I was 43. His officers used to say that he posed himself, that he was retiring and exclusive, and that his headquarters were difficult of access."

We copy what we published by way of comment years ago, at the time we first read the above from the Times. Lee had capacity of a high order. He was graduated first at West Point, Grant thirty-sixth. In Mexico he showed himself a most capable soldier. As to his being beaten by heavy odds being not true, as Grant says, we have only this to say now: "Grant admits in his official report that he had more men killed and wounded than Lee actually had men in his army. At the close of the long struggle Grant still had some hundred thousand men, while at Appomattox Lee surrendered some 8,000 muskets. There is one interesting historical fact given by Grant, which we copy:

"My pursuit of Lee was hazardous. I was in a position of extreme difficulty. You see I was marching away from my supplies, while Lee was marching back on his supplies. If Lee had continued his fight another day I should have had to abandon the pursuit, fall back to Danville, build the railroad, and feed my army. So far as supplies were concerned, I was almost at my last gasp when the surrender took place."

General Grant was possibly the greatest soldier that the North produced. At one time we believed otherwise. He was fortunate in many respects in being pitted against such soldiers as Pendleton, Buckner, and some others. He was brave, sensible, and knew the great resources of the North. His theory was to fight, the Confederates, and destroy their men. They lose and cannot recruit; we lose, and can get two men for one killed. Read a reliable account of his campaign against Lee for eleven months. Read Swinton's account (northern) of the second battle of Gaines's Mill. Suppose Grant's army had been of the size of Lee's, and Lee had commanded an army as strong as Grant's, would there have been but one battle? We trow not. That would have ended Grant and the war. Read Swinton.

The North had over 2,700,000 men in its armies. Grant said so, and the war records since published give the numbers. The Confederates in four years of wear and tear and losses had in all but 600,000. General Cooper, adjutant-general, and born in the North, said that on no day during the four years could the Confederates have put in the field 200,000 men. There was hardly a time after the war had been fully started that the North could not have put 800,000 or 1,000,000 men in the field. General Grant behaved admirably at Appomattox. He rose to his full height then—showed magnanimity, decency, courtesy. Afterwards he bore himself with the gravity, decision, and honesty of a soldier, when he unbuckled his sword at the Cabinet meeting, and laying it on the table, said: "If you disregard the conditions of surrender, and arrest General Lee, I will resign from the army and appeal to the American people."

A Charade.

(For the Dispatch.)

My FIRST was once a hateful word,
Suggesting only shame;
But good men now throughout the world
Revere and bless the name.

Her title to my SECOND,
In her domain of home,
The housewife could not value more,
Were she the Pope of Rome.

My WHOLE was the site of a noted fight
Of Stonewall Jackson's Corps,
And the men in gray, at the close of day,
The victor's laurels wore.

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